



Rebuild Iowa Office

Governor Chester J. Culver
Lt. Governor Patty Judge
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Rebuild Iowa Office
RIAC Conference Call
Thursday, May 20, 2010
2:00 p.m. CST

Call Participants:

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Bill Bywater
Jim Davis

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Emily Hajek
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Welcome and Recovery Update

The Rebuild Iowa Office (RIO) wants to give an overview of what they have been working on. RIO is focused on their “Working to Recover” press releases. These press releases tell the story behind the numbers rather than just showing dollars spent. RIO wants to show what recovery is going on and what volunteers are doing in our state. If you have an idea for an upcoming “Working to Recovery” topic from your community, don’t hesitate to let the RIO Communications Team know.

RIO will participate in flood seminars around the state this summer. Five seminars are planned in Burlington, Cedar Rapids, Waverly, Mason City and Ames in June and July. The initial flood seminar was held in March and was based on the book “A Watershed Year: Anatomy of the Iowa Floods of 2008.” These seminars will talk a lot about climate change, predicting future flooding, and mitigating future damage.

RIO is also working with the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Working with Smart Growth Principals in six impacted communities and exploring how to use climate change data. The Rebuild Iowa Office recently released their April quarterly report detailing how the office is reaching its goals. Right now, RIO is working on the July report as well as the transition plan for next year’s sunset.

Right now, the Rebuild Iowa Office is compiling results from the Speak Up Iowa III survey that was mailed. One thousand surveys were mailed to disaster-impacted individuals and businesses that received disaster assistance. The RIO has received over three hundred and fifty responses to-date. Once all the results are compiled, the RIO will share the results. The main goal of this survey is to understand how Iowans were impacted by the floods and tornadoes, how they are being impacted by the recovery process, and how they view the State’s response. This survey is also available on the RIO website if anyone else is interested in taking the survey.

RIO and other agencies are participating in a Disaster Recovery Exercise in June. To our knowledge, this is the first ever long-term recovery response exercise in the country. Response exercises happen frequently, but long-term recovery response is something that doesn't occur. This will be an opportunity to get everyone who participates in long-term recovery together in a room and create a recovery plan to use in the case of a future disaster.

RIO has also put out a press release for the Rebuild Iowa Award for Service. These awards will be to recognize those who have gone above and beyond in disaster recovery. Groups, businesses, and individuals are able to participate. The applications will be reviewed in June and award announcements will occur in June or July.

2010 Legislative Update

For HF705, the Department of Public Safety (DPS), RIO, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division (HSEMD), Department of Administrative Services (DAS), and Department of Human Services (DHS) recommended that Iowa follows Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requirements for weather safe rooms. A rule making process ensued and on July 1st, a rule will go in to effect that any new construction for which the property owner wants to claim it includes a weather safe room must follow those standards.

HF759 passed during the 2009 Legislative Session. This bill asked for list of incentives for property owners to get flood insurance. Some bills considered in the house and senate this year did not pass. This included House Study Bill (HSB) 512 and Senate Study Bill (SSB) 3089 which covered recommendations regarding real estate disclosure forms and insurance applications. These were both considered but they were not able to pass as there was resistance by the insurance community. RIO hopes to see more action on these in the future.

RIO went into the 2010 Legislative Session with three priorities: establish permanent case management system, smart planning, and improvement of watershed and floodplain management policies. Action was taken on all three priorities as well as consideration of all RIAC recommendations.

RIAC Recommendation 1 – Iowa will provide support to individuals and families seeking assistance in rebuilding.

It was very intentional that this was at the top of the Rebuild Iowa Advisory Commission (RIAC) recommendations. Took the approach to get individual case management process in place. Formally in the code HF2422 signed March 22nd.

HF2294 uses local long-term recovery committees (LTRCs) to administer voucher programs to distribute assistance funds in smaller disasters. HF2531 waves penalty and interest for taxpayers who have to file an amended state return because they mistakenly thought federal tax benefits were also available on the state tax returns.

Both HF2504 and SF2225 did not pass. These would have doubled the criminal fines in disaster areas. In areas like Cedar Rapids where there are many vacated homes and this would have created a deterrent in such disaster areas.

RIAC Recommendation 2 – State and local governments should prioritize availability and affordability of adequate, affordable housing.

HF2531 (Standing Appropriations Bill) states that Iowa Finance Authority (IFA) can use Housing Trust Fund funding to support the Iowa Mortgage Help Initiative. Agencies are working to identify ways to assist those facing foreclosure due to the disaster.

RIAC Recommendation 3 – The state should provide incentives for Iowa’s small businesses, microenterprises, and non-profits for restoration and rebuilding of their businesses from this disaster and future major disasters.

HF2422 established a Business Disaster Recovery Task Force to outline recommendations for business disaster recovery. This is the same bill that addressed individual case management. The Business Disaster Recovery Task Force will be facilitated by Jacqui DiGiacinto from RIO, and their first meeting in will be in June with their recommendations due November 15.

SF2389 (RIIF Bill) appropriated twenty thousand dollars for a business assistance internet site by IDED. This bill also appropriated five million for a small business loan program Save our Small Businesses Fund.

RIAC Recommendation 4 – The state should lead in planning, establishing expectations statewide, and securing funding for infrastructure repair, rebuilding, and/or construction.

Infrastructure remains the single greatest need in the state as far as the size of the gap that exists between the need and the available funds. Approximately seventy million dollars in disaster funds were allocated this year. HF2531 (Standing Appropriations Bill) had projects in Linn County and Cedar Rapids. HF2389 (RIIF Bill) had IJOBS funding for use across the state, thirty million dollars for a Disaster Prevention Program, and two million dollars for Watershed Improvement Review Board.

RIAC Recommendation 5 – The state should identify, create, and sustain funding options and provide flexibility for local and state governments to assist in rebuilding an even better Iowa.

HF2531 (Standing Appropriations Bill) provided more flexibility on dates a bond issue may be scheduled in disaster-impacted areas. SF2310 outlines the Natural Resources Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund that would implement a proposed Iowa Constitution amendment. If Iowa sees an increase in sales tax, a percentage has to go to the trust fund. This is important because there are provisions that would help to improve water quality and flood mitigation.

SF2294 was considered but did not pass. This would have created a future state disaster recovery fund once emergency funds were replenished. It was disappointing that SF2294 did not pass because the RIAC recommended that funding is secure for future disasters. Iowa has been facing budget constraints that have contributed to the inability to move on the issue.

RIAC Recommendation 6 – The state must invest in local emergency management agencies to achieve the baseline capacity needed to keep Iowa safer from future disasters.

Budget constraints made it difficult for some proposals during the 2010 Legislative Session. HSB672/SSB3187 would have established an Emergency Management Trust Fund. This would have been funded by an insurance surcharge. Renters would pay an additional dollar on policy, single family homes would pay two dollars, and commercial policies would pay an additional four dollars. This bill did not pass. SSB3178 proposed to set a floor on property tax rates for emergency services. Currently there is a cap but no floor and there are some areas that aren't collecting enough to support their emergency services.

RIAC Recommendation 7 – The state should ensure policy and programs that sustain community identity, quality of life, and cultural heritage.

There were several provisions that pass this Legislative Session such as SF2380. This changed the tax credit statute in Iowa. It retained the Iowa tax credit, but it reduced its cap from fifty million to forty-five million. SF2389 (RIIF Bill) appropriated twelve million for Community Attraction and Tourism grant funding, four million for River Enhancement Community Attraction grant funding, and funding for Main Street projects.

RIAC Recommendation 8 – The state will lead in developing guidance for and support for integrated, regional planning to address recovery and leverage multi-jurisdictional strengths for ongoing initiatives.

SF2389 (RIIF Bill) established Smart Planning in Iowa.

RIAC Recommendation 9 – The state will move state policy forward and lead regional and local discussion on floodplain and watershed management.

The Water Resources Coordinating Council (WRCC) created sixteen policy recommendations and nine funding recommendations. However, there were only five policy recommendations that passed in other bills. SF2316 addressed twelve policy recommendations and passed the Senate but did not pass the House Committee

RIAC Recommendation 10 – The state will complete floodplain mapping for the entire state using state-of-the-art technology, implementing the mapping process as expeditiously as is reasonable and practical.

The DNR is coordinating this effort. There was a slight reallocation of the CDBG funds in SF2389 (RIIF Bill) dedicating ten of the fifteen million to the Iowa Flood Center.

RIAC Recommendation 11 – The state must formalize the Rebuild Iowa Office and associated responsibilities related to the 2008 Disaster recovery.

The Rebuild Iowa Office received the level of funding requested from legislature this year, and the twelve FTEs were maintained per SF2367. HF2212 proposed RIO cease operations July 1, 2010. That proposal would have all RIO roles assumed by HSEMD. However, not everything RIO does falls under Homeland Security. For instance, the case management program would go to DHS. It was recognized that RIO still has a lot of work left to do before their sunset in 2011.

RIAC Recommendation 12- All involved agencies, governments, and interested parties should support communications and outreach initiatives to educate and support Iowans as they recover and plan for future disasters.

During 2009 the CC was established, the primary way the communication happens, counties, cities, COGs, there are other ways we need to keep communications open. Need to continue to work with those from the RIAC to ensure their goals are met.

Smart Planning Legislation:

The Smart Planning Legislation (SF2265) did ultimately contain three provisions: Ten Smart Planning Principles, Comprehensive Planning Guidance for cities and counties, and Smart Planning Task Force to develop recommendations by 11/15/10.

That Smart Planning Task Force will fall to the Department of Management (DOM), and they have requested assistance from RIO. Aaron Todd and Annette Mansheim from RIO's Community and Regional Recovery Planning (CARRP) team will take that lead. Initial recommendations are due, and the task force will remain in place through December of 2012.

Planning legislation started as a standalone bill but was moved to SF2389, the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund Bill due to some efforts to attach Eminent Domain Language to the bill. There is language in the RIIF Bill that includes an eminent domain explanation, but nothing expands eminent domain.

In an effort to create incentives for cities and counties to participate in Smart Planning, the legislature created a thirty million dollar IJOBS-funded Disaster Prevention Program. IFA is in charge of administering the program. Eligibility to apply is based on the ability of the city or county to show they have followed the Smart Planning Principles and comprehensive planning guidelines. IFA will hold workshops for that program and will begin accepting applications later this summer. Once IJOBS finalizes the rules as of June 9th, more info will be available.

Floodplain Management Legislation:

HF759 required recommendations from the Water Resources Coordinating Council by 11/15/09. HF2531 (Standing Appropriations Bill) requires the WRCC and others to work on establishing an Iowa chapter of State Floodplain Managers Association, education, and marketing for flood risk and floodplain awareness. Establishing a local chapter of State Floodplain Managers is underway. During the 2008 disasters, some cities and counties needed to scramble to establish who would fill that role. The state is also working with the ISU Extension to identify how to make steps forward on an education process.

In HF2459 (Watershed Bill), the first recommendation authorizes various agencies and WRCC to seek funding for watershed projects. The second recommendation in this bill outlines watershed governance via Watershed Management Authorities. It takes the existing language and outlines how cities and counties may cooperatively establish watershed authority.

There were some policy recommendations included in SF2316 that did not pass in the 2010 Legislative Session:

- Regulate the .2% or 500-year floodplain
- Establish stormwater standards or best practices
- Enhance safety for critical facilities that are intended to support the health and safety of citizens (jails, hospitals)
- Hydrological tiling study
- WRCC to make watershed management recommendations by 11/15/10
- Integrate multipurpose wetlands into watersheds
- Update conservation practice criteria to reflect changing precipitation

SF2371 reduces royalty fees to remove soil and sand from rivers in Linn and Black Hawk Counties on a pilot basis through 6/30/15.

SSB3170 and HSB608 explored the idea that state financial support should not occur in the 500-year floodplain. If the state isn't willing to restrict development, can the state say you may build "at your own risk?" However, these bills did not pass.

RIO is very pleased that every one of the RIAC recommendations remains alive and remains important and continues to encourage the passage of legislation. It is amazing that RIAC recommendations have seen such action in the last two legislative sessions. It is obvious that the RIAC members identified the right issues and the right recommendations and pursued those.

Q&A:

Jim Davis: There is going to be resistance on issues related to real estate disclosure forms. Those in the real estate industry already have so many forms already and are overwhelmed.

Susan Judkins Josten: As you can understand, we are trying to prevent people from being in the dark on knowing whether or not the home is located in the flood plain. One suggestion is including a statement on the disclosure form that stops short of the seller having to provide the information.

Jim Davis: It was mentioned that IDED received money for a website to access business information. Can you provide more information on this website and what it will contain?

Susan Judkins Josten: SF2389 (RIIF Bill) appropriated twenty thousand dollars for the development of a business assistance website. This would include a wealth of information for businesses and would serve as a one-stop-shop on the web. Once it is completed, it will be promoted by IDED

Jim Davis: Infrastructure repair is still a huge obstacle for recovery. Can you tell us more about the funding allocation?

Susan Judkins Josten: The infrastructure funding came from many different pots. IJOBS funding provided allocations to a number of communities for specific projects. Two million was allocated for the Watershed Improvement Review Board, and thirty million dollars was allocated for the Disaster Prevention Program which will have a competitive application process.

Jim Davis: How is funding being utilized for infrastructure repair?

Susan Judkins Josten: The thirty million dollar Disaster Prevention Program outlines certain projects that can be funded with the money, and they are all infrastructure projects. Also, one hundred sixty-five million dollars was allocated during the 2009 Legislative Session for disaster-related infrastructure projects.

Jim Davis: In terms of infrastructure repair, where would be without the IJOBS money?

Susan Judkins Josten: There is still a gap of a few hundred million dollars. There are so many projects that are eligible for FEMA and it leaves a significant amount of need with a limited amount of assistance.

Jim Davis: Can you provide more information regarding the River Enhancement Community Attraction program?

Susan Judkins Josten: This program is administered by IDED. The program was created before the floods but it has not operated because some funds were pulled back for disaster. Funding for the River Enhancement Community Attraction was appropriated in SF2389 (RIIF Bill).

Jim Davis: There have been some concerns regarding some legislative proposals. What is the state's plan between now and the next legislative session to get some proposals implemented or addressed?

Susan Judkins Josten: Basically stepping back and deciding what can be addressed without legislation. We need to look at the bigger picture. Can program changes at the federal level, such as with the US Department of Agriculture, impact future disaster assistance? Discussions will happen arm-and-arm with leaders at the state level as well as with Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) and Iowa Congressional Delegation. There will be more disasters and larger disasters in the future. More education and discussion is important to ensure Iowa keeps the conversation going.

Jim Davis: Mitigating future risks remains a high priority for Iowa. It's not going to be easy to get that addressed. Nevertheless, we are going to be remiss if we don't have any real progress toward flood mitigation. Iowa will be right back to where it was after the floods of 1993. An ongoing concern is that people's memory starts to fade. Is there any thought as to what sort of impact the recovery will have on upcoming political campaigns?

Emily Hajek: Disaster recovery is impacting thousands of Iowans every day and inevitably will be discussed during any upcoming political campaigns. You mentioned memories fading; it was evident that less than two years after the floods and tornadoes, memories have already started to fade.

Amy Truax: Just by looking at the volume of funding that has been already allocated, how can we prevent this from happening again? There is significant research that shows we will have more disasters, and Iowa can't afford to keep spending the amount of money it did for the 2008 disasters in the future.

Bill Bywater: It's so impressive that all twelve RIAC recommendations were addressed. We owe the Rebuild Iowa Office a big thanks as well as the other recovery partners who have made it happen.

Closing Remarks

Emily Hajek: The Rebuild Iowa Office appreciates the continued interest of the RIAC members. If there are any questions or comments you would like to share with the office, please keep in touch.